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CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A method for establishing a multi-protocol label switched ("MPLS") path for forwarding a packet formatted in accordance with MPLS, including with a label stack, in a communication network, the through a communication network including a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain interconnected by a non-label switched domain, the method comprising:

establishing a tunnel across the non-label switched domain which connects the first label switched domain and the second label switched domain;

encapsulating the packet and label stack by appending a non-MPLS protocol header to the packet and label stack, thereby forming to form an encapsulated packet;

setting an identifier in the non-MPLS protocol header to indicate that the label stack is in the encapsulated packet; and

forwarding the encapsulated packet through the tunnel;

receiving the encapsulated packet at the second label switched domain; and

de-encapsulating the encapsulated packet by removing the non-MPLS protocol header, whereby label stack information is preserved.

2. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein establishing a tunnel includes mapping a top label of the label stack to the tunnel.

3. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

4. (original) A method according to claim 3, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

5. (cancelled)

6. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the first label switched domain is a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) domain.

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7. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the second label switched domain is a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) domain.
8. (original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.
9. (previously presented) A method according to claim 8, wherein encapsulating the packet and label stack information includes providing an MPLS identifier in the encapsulated packet such that the second label switched domain may identify the packet and label stack.
10. (currently amended) A device for establishing a multi-protocol label switched ("MPLS") path for forwarding a packet with a label stack in a communication network, the communication network including a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain interconnected by a non-label switched domain, the device comprising:
 - label switching forwarding logic for identifying the next hop for the packet;
 - encapsulating logic for encapsulating the packet and label stack information by appending a non-MPLS protocol header to the packet and label stack to form an encapsulated packet and for establishing a tunnel across the non-label switched domain which connects the first label switched domain and the second label switched domain, including logic operable to set a label switching protocol identifier in the non-MPLS protocol header such that the second label switched domain can identify the packet and label stack; and
 - forwarding logic for forwarding the encapsulated packet through the tunnel.
11. (original) A device according to claim 10, wherein the label switching forwarding logic includes mapping logic for mapping a top label of the label stack to the tunnel.
12. (original) A device according to claim 10, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.
13. (original) A device according to claim 12, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

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14. (cancelled)

15. (original) A device according to claim 10, wherein the first label switched domain is a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) domain.

16. (original) A device according to claim 10, wherein the second label switched domain is a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) domain.

17. (original) A device according to claim 10, wherein the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

18. (previously presented) A device according to claim 17, wherein the encapsulated packet includes an MPLS identifier such that the second label switched domain may identify the packet and label stack.

19. (currently amended) A computer program product for generating a packet for use on a computer system for establishing a multi-protocol label switched ("MPLS") path for forwarding a packet with a label stack in a communication network, the communication network including a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain interconnected by a non-label switched domain, the computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having computer readable program code thereon, the computer readable program code including:

program code for establishing an IP tunnel across the non-label switched domain which connects the first label switched domain and the second label switched domain;

program code for encapsulating the packet and label stack information to form an encapsulated packet by appending a non-MPLS protocol header to the packet and label stack, and setting a label switching protocol identifier in the non-MPLS protocol header such that the second label switched domain can identify the packet and label stack; and

program code for forwarding the encapsulated packet through the tunnel.

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20. (original) A computer program product according to claim 19, further including program code for mapping a top label of the label stack to the tunnel.

21. (original) A computer program according to claim 19, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

22. (original) A computer program product according to claim 21, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

23. (cancelled)

24. (original) A computer program product according to claim 19, wherein the first label switched domain is a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) domain.

25. (original) A computer program product according to claim 19, wherein the second label switched domain is a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) domain.

26. (original) A computer program product according to claim 19, wherein the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

27. (previously presented) A computer program product according to claim 26, further including program code for providing an MPLS identifier in the encapsulated packet such that the second label switched domain may identify the packet and label stack.

28. (currently amended) A method for establishing a multi-protocol label switched ("MPLS") path for forwarding a packet with a label stack in a communication network, the communication network including a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain interconnected by a non-label switched domain, the method comprising:

establishing a tunnel across the non-label switched domain which connects the first label switched domain and the second label switched domain;

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receiving an encapsulated non-MPLS protocol packet having a non-MPLS header from the tunnel, the encapsulated packet including a label stack;

recognizing a label switching protocol identifier in the non-MPLS header;

in response to recognizing the label switching protocol identifier, de-encapsulating the encapsulated packet and label stack; and

forwarding the de-encapsulated packet and label stack across the second label switched domain.

29. (original) A method according to claim 28, wherein the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

30. (original) A method according to claim 28, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

31. (original) A method according to claim 30, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

32. (cancelled)

33. (cancelled)

34. (currently amended) A device for establishing a multi-protocol label switched (“MPLS”) path for forwarding a packet with a label stack in a communication network, the communication network including a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain interconnected by a non-label switched domain, the device comprising:

receiving logic for receiving an encapsulated packet from a tunnel across the non-label switched domain which connects the first label switched domain and the second label switched domain, the encapsulated packet having a non-MPLS header and including a label stack in a payload portion;

recognizing a label switching protocol identifier in the non-MPLS header;

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in response to recognizing the label switching protocol identifier, de-encapsulating logic for de-encapsulating the encapsulated packet and label stack; and

forwarding logic for forwarding the de-encapsulated packet and label stack across the second label switched domain.

35. (original) A device according to claim 34, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

36. (original) A device according the claim 35, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

37. (original) A device according to claim 34, wherein the first label switched domain is an MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

38. (cancelled)

39. (cancelled)

40. (currently amended) A computer program product for use on a computer system for establishing a multi-protocol label switched (“MPLS”) path for forwarding a packet with a label stack in a communication network, the communication network including a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain interconnected by a non-label switched domain, the computer program product comprising a computer useable medium having computer readable program code thereon, the computer readable program code including:

program code for establishing a tunnel across the non-label switched domain which connects the first label switched domain and the second label switched domain;

program code for receiving an encapsulated packet from the tunnel, the encapsulated packet having a non-MPLS header and including a label stack in a payload portion;

program code for recognizing a label switching protocol identifier in the non-MPLS header;

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program code operable in response to recognizing the label switching protocol identifier to de-encapsulate for de-encapsulating the encapsulated packet and the label stack; and

program code for forwarding the de-encapsulated packet and label stack across the second label switched domain.

41. (original) A computer program product according to claim 40, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

42. (original) A computer program product according to claim 41, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

43. (original) A computer program product according to claim 40, wherein the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

44. (cancelled)

45. (cancelled).

46. (currently amended) A method, executed in a communication system having a first label switched domain interconnected with a second label switched domain by a non-label switched domain, for forwarding a label switched packet from the first label switched domain to the second label switched domain, the method comprising:

establishing a tunnel from an egress device of the first label switched domain to an ingress device of the second label switched domain over the non-label switched domain;

encapsulating the label switched packet by the egress device of the first label switched domain by appending a non-label switching protocol header to the label switched packet;

setting an identifier in the non-label switching protocol header, the identifier being indicative that the label switched packet is encapsulated by the non-label switching protocol header;

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forwarding the encapsulated label switched packet by the egress device of the first label switched domain over the tunnel to the ingress device of the second label switched domain;

in response to recognition of the identifier, de-encapsulating the encapsulated label switched packet by the ingress device of the second label switched domain; and

forwarding the de-encapsulated label switched packet by the ingress device of the second label switched domain based upon label switching information in the packet.

47. (original) A communication system according to claim 46, wherein the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

48. (original) A communication system according to claim 46, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

49. (original) A communication system according to claim 48, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

50. (currently amended) A computer program stored on a computer readable medium for executing a tunneling protocol for interconnecting a first label switched domain and a second label switched domain, comprising:

encapsulation means for encapsulating a payload packet from a label switched protocol having a label stack by appending a non-label switching header to the payload packet; and setting a protocol type indicator in the header for identifying the label switched protocol of the payload packet.

51. (previously presented) A computer program stored on a computer readable medium according to claim 50, wherein the label switched protocol is MPLS.

52. (previously presented) A computer program stored on a computer readable medium according to claim 50, wherein the tunneling protocol is a modified Generic routing Encapsulation (GRE) protocol.

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53. (currently amended) A communication system comprising a first label switched domain having an egress device, a second label switched domain having an ingress device and a non-label switched domain which couples the egress device of the first label switched domain to the ingress device of the second label switched domain, wherein a label switched path for forwarding a packet and a label stack is established by

establishing a tunnel from an egress device of the first label switched domain to an ingress device of the second label switched domain over the non-label switched domain;

encapsulating the packet and label stack by the egress device of the first label switched domain by appending a non-label switched header;

setting an identifier in the non-label switched header, the identifier being indicative of the presence of the label stack in the encapsulated packet;

forwarding the encapsulated packet and label stack by the egress device of the first label switched domain over the tunnel to the ingress device of the second label switched domain;

in response to recognition of the identifier, de-encapsulating the encapsulated packet and label stack by the ingress device of the second label switched domain; and

forwarding the de-encapsulated packet and label stack by the ingress device of the second label switched domain based upon label switching information in the packet.

54. (original) A communication system according to claim 53, the first label switched domain is a MPLS domain and the second label switched domain is a MPLS domain.

55. (original) A communication system according to claim 53, wherein the tunnel is an IP tunnel.

56. (original) A communication system according to claim 55, wherein the IP tunnel is a Generic Routing Encapsulation (GRE) tunnel.

57. (currently amended) A communication system comprising:

a first label switched domain for forwarding a label switched packet, the first label switched domain having a plurality of label switching devices including an egress device;

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a second label switched domain for forwarding the label switched packet, the second label switched domain having a plurality of label switching devices including an ingress device; and

a non-label switched domain having a plurality of forwarding devices, the non-label switched domain coupled the egress device of the first label switched domain to the ingress device of the second label switched domain; wherein:

the egress device establishes a tunnel from the first label switched domain to the ingress device of the second label switched domain across the non-label switched domain;

the egress device encapsulates the label switched packet by appending a non-label switched header and setting an identifier in the header indicative of the presence of the label switched packet;

the egress device forwards the encapsulated label switched packet over the tunnel to the ingress device of the second label switched domain;

the ingress device receives the encapsulated label switched packet from the tunnel; in response to recognition of the identifier, the ingress device de-encapsulates the encapsulated label switched packet; and

the ingress device forwards the de-encapsulated label switched packet based on label switching information in the packet.